



## Fort Custer Horse Friends Association

c/o Sue Bertch, 1959 E Y Ave., Vicksburg, MI 49097

April 1, 2009

Michigan Legislative Committees,  
Senate Natural Resources & Environmental Affairs  
House Great Lakes & Environment  
Senate Hearing Room  
Ground Floor Boji Tower  
124 W. Allegan Street  
Lansing, Michigan 48933

Subject: SB 388 (Birkholz), SB 389 (Basham), HB 4677 (Warren), HB 4678 (Meekhof)

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Melva Parker and I live in Battle Creek, Michigan. I am the President of Fort Custer Horse Friends Association. I would like to comment in favor of the legislation being presented before you today and request that my letter be presented as part of the testimony for these documents.

I have visited Fort Custer Recreation Area since it was opened to the public after it was deeded to the State of Michigan through President Nixon's Legacy of Parks in 1971. My husband and I, our children and dogs enjoy a variety of interests including camping, hiking, biking, swimming and bird watching. In 1994, I began enjoying another sport, horseback riding. Equestrians have been asking for the development of a horsemen's campground since the very first organization meeting in 1974. In 1998, we formed our 501 C-3 Organization to work with the park to maintain trails and work toward a horsemen's campground. We participated in the development of the new Master Plan for the park. The main obstacle at this point is that there is no money for developing and maintaining additional facilities.

Fort Custer is a popular park in that it accommodates diverse user groups on multi-use trails, equestrians, hikers, dog sleds, bikers, hunters, disc golfers and joggers. It has a modern campground with 210 sites and a large beach area with a bathhouse and a 25 mile multi-use trail system. However, many of these accommodations were installed in the early years when the park opened. The infrastructure is aging, the entrance road is potholed, the campsites need upgrading in electrical and plumbing. The sewer and drain fields failed this past year and needed emergency repair. The State Park Endowment Fund established in 1994 was supposed to provide adequate monies to renovate and improve our recreation areas, but the withdrawal of state funding in 2004 has negated its' effectiveness.

I am only using Fort Custer as an example of what is happening all over the State of Michigan. It is our obligation as a society to provide and protect the right of all citizens to have affordable access to

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state parks and forest and boating access. I see this legislation as a last chance opportunity to provide the funding to improve and protect our state lands for use by the public.

I commend the work of the members of the Citizens Committee on Michigan State Parks for researching and presenting a viable solution. I also thank Senators Birkholz and Basham and Representatives Warren and Meekhof for drafting the legislation before us today. I look forward to the possibilities that can be achieved in our parks with the passage of these bills. With the decline of manufacturing in the state, we must nurture our remaining industries, tourism and agriculture. The horse industry is a large part of tourism, agriculture and open space. Make this state horse friendly and draw in equestrians from surrounding states, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky. Our state needs to build on what we have, or that could be lost too.

Sincerely,

Melva J. Parker  
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